
Leaders Who Challenge the Status Quo in this Issue of ASK by Todd Post

**About the author**

Todd Post is the editor of ASK Magazine and a member of Edutech Ltd, a diversified management consulting firm providing technical services to Government and private sector clients. He has written for many publications both in print and online. To contact Todd send him an email at tpost@edutechLtd.com and tell him what you think about this issue of ASK.

Mention status quo in a room full of project managers and you're likely to see a few people wincing. Note that no one yet is talking about a particular policy or regulation. It's just the word Status Quo itself and all that it connotes that turns the mood sour.

You don't need to be a linguist to understand the difference between denotation and connotation with a word like Status Quo in your vocabulary. Webster's defines Status Quo as "the existing state of affairs." Well, there's nothing pejorative about that. But why do so many of us hear something else? "An untenable existing state of affairs" sounds more like it...or "the sterile conditions around here"...or "the stifling reasons I don't enjoy my work anymore."

Perhaps you have your own definition.

In this issue of ASK, we consider the Status Quo and what it connotes for several exceptional project managers. Our articles address what it takes to challenge the Status Quo in the face of all sorts of pressures and constraints, bureaucracy and intransigence. We find several solutions, all tailored to the unique circumstances that our authors encountered as they smashed their way through the status quo bedrock in their respective organizations. Michael Jansen found inspiration in his youthful experiments with the junk collected by his parents and stored in the family's garage; Steven Gonzalez and his colleagues at NASA's Johnson Space Center looked to the future for their inspiration—about a hundred years; and Joan Salute turned inward to her core values. These are just some of the people and stories you'll find in this issue of ASK.

I suspect if you've ever been in a situation where you've wondered why you can't change things around you then you'll draw plenty of inspiration from these articles. Don't forget to send us your own examples of challenging the status quo, which we'll post in the next issue's Loop Section. Tell us why the Status Quo makes you shiver when you hear that word, or why not.

Enjoy the issue and thanks for being part of our readership.

Todd Post

I Would Prefer Not by Dr. Edward Hoffmann

One of my favorite lines from literature is, "I would prefer not."

The words are spoken by a character in Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scriven – A Story of Wall Street." In it, a productive office is tossed into turbulence based on one employee's simple but powerful response that he "prefers not" to do an assignment. The employee, Bartleby, is a quiet, unassuming, steady worker, yet disagreeable to new tasks. His boss, the narrator of the story, tries to force Bartleby to change, but the latter simply won't. The narrator's actions, behaviors, considerations and strategies to alter Bartleby provide the framework of the story, a brilliant illumination on the challenge of teams, projects and leadership.

I wondered recently if I have a greater understanding of Bartleby today than when I first read the story in high school—years ago. What have I learned? How would I have reacted to Bartleby? Since Melville published the story in 1853, there have been numerous offerings on how to lead. Experts on the subject have offered all kinds of models, prescriptions, guidelines and advice. Books promise to offer anyone the straightforward secrets on how to motivate, guide, coach, persuade, inspire, and lead. Follow these six simple steps and voila...we're on the way to becoming just like Lincoln, Grant, Lee, Moses, or Attila the Hun.



Dr. Edward Hoffmann

Dr. Hoffman is director of the NASA Academy of Program and Project Leadership. He is responsible for the development of program and project leaders and teams within NASA. Dr. Hoffman develops training curricula, consulting services, research projects and special studies in program and project management.

To answer my own questions, I turn to an early episode in my NASA career. Actually, it was the first day of work. I was going through security and waiting on a line to be fingerprinted. I heard laughter. When I reached the front of the line (the sharp reader will note based on my need to stand on a line for new employees that I am dating myself) I realized this happiness was coming from